A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

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ECCLESIASTES ix. 2.

There is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.

THE Argument of the *Epicures* againſt Providence agrees well with their Doctrine concerning the Beginning of the world, and is every whit as fooliſh and unreaſonable.

They tell us, That ſuch an attendance upon the works of nature and the actions of men as Providence implies, is too mean for God's ſupreme Greatneſs, and too troubleſome for his perfect Happineſs; That his Injoyments and Satisfactions would be interrupted with his Cares; That he muſt be wearied with the endleſs continuance, and diſtracted with the

infinite variety of them; That Men are too inconſiderable, for him to regard what they do; That he is ſo far from being concerned, from being either pleaſed or angry with them, that he is not ſo much as a Spectator of their actions; worſhipping or blaſpheming him, doing right or wrong one to another, is all alike; nothing can move him to take notice, much leſs to interpoſe or meddle to do them either good or harm. This kind of Reaſoning was juſtly deſpiſed for the weakneſs of it, and juſtly ſuſpected to be rather a crafty inſinuation of Atheiſm, and a purſuance of their deſign againſt Religion, than a way of good and concluſive arguing, even in their own opinion.

How could men, that diſcourſe clearly and conſiſtently in many other matters, fall into ſuch a groſs miſtake, as to conclude concerning the Nature of God, which is infinitely perfect, from the defects and imperfections of a man?

Becauſe *we* cannot attend long, nor to many things at once, but are tired with thinking, and perplexed with doubts, wavering and uncertain to reſolve, erring in the choice of our end, and, when that is well choſen, eaſily bewildered and loſt in our way: therefore infinite Knowledge and almighty Power muſt be liable to the ſame inconveniences with our Ignorance and Weakneſs.

Plainly to repeat ſuch an Argument is enough for the Anſwer of it.

The more uſual Objection againſt Providence is more

more difficult, which all that have treated upon that ſubject, have thought worthy of a very ſerious conſideration.

If God govern the World, how come things to paſs ſo unlikely to be ſuffered by infallible Wiſdom and Juſtice?

What Rule is it by which he diſtributes good and evil things?

How muſt we defend his Goodneſs, when the Righteous are in adverſity, and the Wicked proſper?

Why do not things befall men according to their works; but oftentimes *there be juſt men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous?* Eccleſ. 8. 14. How come *all things alike unto all, one Event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that ſacrificeth, and to him that ſacrificeth not? as is the good, ſo is the ſinner; and he that ſweareth, as he that feareth an Oath.*

It's no wonder that theſe ſhould be hard Queſtions to them who knew nothing certainly of Rewards and Puniſhments after Death.

But it would ſeem ſtrange, that they who were better inſtructed by Revelation, ſhould be at a ſtand ſometimes, and doubtful what to reſolve; if every Day's experience did not teach us how apt even wiſe men are to hearken to the ſuggeſtions of Paſſion againſt Reaſon, and to break out into haſty expreſſions, contrary to their habitual perſwaſion. *Job*

Job complains, *Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their houſes are ſafe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them,* Job 21. 7, 9.

David ſaith of himſelf, *I was envious at the fooliſh, when I ſaw the proſperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.* Pſal. 73. 3, 5.

He was ready to conclude that he had been a good man to no purpoſe, *Verily, I have cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocence. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chaſtned every morning.* Verſ. 13, 14.

They were tempted to a prophane misbelief, their thoughts were diſcompoſed for a little while, but preſently ſettled again; as appears in the proceſs of their Diſcourſes, in which they recover into the way of reaſoning aright concerning theſe things, and anſwer their own Objections.

Solomon calls this *an evil under the ſun, that there is one Event unto all:* Eccleſ. 9 3. Not that he either doubts of or blames God's Providence, but the great evil ſpoken of is the evil of mens fooliſh conſtruction and falſe conſequence, mentioned in the words following, *yea, alſo the heart of the ſons of men is full of evil, and madneſs is in their heart while they live.* This ſeems to be the ſame effect of the ſame cauſe which are plainly deſcribed, *Eccleſ.* 8. 11. *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.*

But

But what-ever thoſe men, who would by all means diſcharge themſelves of the Fear of God, may be forward to infer from this uncertainty of Events, either, that there is no Providence, or, that God is unconcerned whether men be juſt or unjuſt; it will appear, when the whole matter is laid together, that their inference is raſh and ill-grounded; that Reaſon, as well as Religion, is againſt them; that this order in the Government of the World is neceſſary to the Wiſdom, and conſiſtent with the Juſtice of God, and with his Goodneſs too, and with *David*'s Teſtimony concerning him, *Pſal.* 11. 7. *The righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, his countenance doth behold the upright.*

There is indeed very often one event of Health and Sickneſs, Riches and Poverty, Peace and War, Victory and Defeat, to the Righteous and to the Wicked, of which, common obſervation is proof enough, without the Authority of Scripture: but this is no argument againſt Providence, as it will appear, if theſe Three things be conſidered.

1. That the ſame things uncertainly and indifferently to befall the Righteous and the Wicked in this life, is unavoidably neceſſary.
2. That they who from hence object againſt Providence are no competent Judges in the caſe, and ſuppoſe in their Objection that which is falſe.
3. That, however, the Day of Judgment is a ſufficient Anſwer to their Objecton.

I. For

I. For the ſame things uncertainly and indifferently to befall the Righteous and the Wicked in this life, is unavoidably neceſſary.

If Proſperity and Affliction were the certain effects of God's Love and Hatred, the conſtant marks of his Favour and Diſpleaſure, it would be impoſſible to reconcile what we ſee every day, with what we are taught to believe. But Proſperity and Affliction have other cauſes, and there is a neceſſity of their happening uncertainly, *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*, as well from the nature of men, as from their relations and mutual dependencies, and from the order of this life to the next as a ſtate of probation. This neceſſity will be evident, if we conſider,

1. There muſt be *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*, becauſe men have the dominion over their own actions, and do that which themſelves chuſe to do.

The Fire and Hail, the Ice and Snow fulfill the will of God, the Plants flouriſh and wither, and the Seaſons change, and the Heavenly bodies move exactly according to the intention and deſign of their Maker, not by any Senſe or Knowledge in them, but by a neceſſity of Nature: but Man is indued with Knowledge, and muſt fulfill the Will of God in another way, as directed by a Rule, and perſwaded by ſufficient Motives; not conſtrained by Almighty Power, as the mechanical World, but ſubmitting freely to the ſovereign Authority of God, who hath ſhewed him the End of his creation, and expects from him

him a reaſonable ſervice, and hath ſet before him Good and Evil, Life and Death, that he may chuſe either Obedience and its Reward, or Sin and its Puniſhment.

This is Man's nature, and God's way of governing it. And though ſometimes he changes the hearts of men, alters their inclinations, makes them chuſe and reſolve as it ſeems expedient to him, by an influence upon their underſtanding and will, which they neither diſcern, nor can reſiſt: yet the reaſon of this argument is ſtill the ſame; becauſe this ſecret and effectual operation of God doth not take away the natural liberty of Man's will, but only over-rule and determine it in ſome particular caſes: in others he leaves Men to themſelves. He commands them to worſhip Him; and ſuffers them to worſhip Idols. He requires them to be obedient to Superiours, and juſt one to another; and permits them to be guilty of Diſobedience, Rebellion, Murther, Adultery, Robbery, Falſe witneſs, and all the Malice, and Fraud and violent perverting of Judgment and Juſtice that Men are tempted to by Ambition and Covetouſneſs.

Since therefore a great part of mens Calamities happens to them by the Wickedneſs of their Neighbours, and Wealth and Greatneſs oftentimes are procured by their own Wickedneſs and Uſurpation, (which though God diſapproves and ſtrictly forbids, and declares that he will puniſh, yet many times he doth not interpoſe his irreſiſtible Power to hinder,) it evidently

follows, that the Sin of the Oppreſſor may make him rich and proſperous, and the Innocent oppreſt man poor and afflicted; and that theſe things muſt fall out as uncertainly as we ſee they do, becauſe they depend upon ſo uncertain a thing as the Will of Man.

2. There muſt be *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*, becauſe a great deal of Proſperity and Affliction befalls men, not as the reward or the effect of any thing done by themſelves, but by deſcent from their Parents, whoſe Vertues and Vices have great influence upon the perſons and fortunes of their Children by the Providence of God, and by the Laws of men, and by the courſe of Nature.

Firſt, Proſperity or Affliction happens to the Children from the Obedience or Sin of the Parents by the Providence of God, according to this declared and often repeated Rule, *That he viſits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him; and ſheweth mercy unto thouſands of them that love him and keep his commandments*, Exod. 20. 5, 6. & 34. 7. Deut. 5. 9, 10. Jer. 32. 18.

Of this there are many examples in the Scripture: and that not only when the Children imitate the Sin of their Parents, as for inſtance, when they commit Idolatry, and worſhip the Falſe gods of their Fathers; or, when they partake in their Guilt, in keeping that which to their knowledge was got by Fraud and Oppreſſion; or, when they inherit Eſtates with a Curſe for the Injuſtice

juſtice and Extortion with which they were raiſed, though that Injuſtice and Extortion be unknown to them, in which caſe the Eſtate may be found guilty, and the Owner acquitted: But beſides all theſe caſes, we find alſo the Innocent Children ſuffering for the Sins of their Forefathers.

Some think it very difficult to make out the Juſtice of this proceeding.

But the Soveraignty of God ſignifies little, if it will not ſerve to defend his Juſtice, in making Men rich or poor, live long or die ſoon; if it be not a ſatisfactory account for ſuch things, That the Supreme Lord gave and took away.

But this way and method of Providence may be alſo defended, from the uſefulneſs of it to reſtrain Men that believe, from the commiſſion of Sin; eſpecially thoſe groſs and crying Sins, for which the Sinner ſhall not be puniſh'd in his Perſon only, but alſo in the calamities and deſtruction of his Poſterity.

Thus the Wiſdom of God provides, that the Antidote ſhall grow upon the ſame root from which the Poiſon ſprings; that the Remedy againſt the moſt dangerous Temptations ſhall be found in the ſame Affection from whence the Temptation ariſes.

Nothing doth more generally and powerfully and conſtantly affect men, than the concerns of their Children: For their ſakes they will imbitter their whole life with continual Cares, patiently undergoe the moſt ſlaviſh Drudgeries, be guilty of the vileſt Actions, do

any thing, and endure any thing, to leave their Poſterity more wealth and an higher place; and yet if ſome of them may be believed, they deſire neither riches nor honour for themſelves. They talk of the World like Philoſophers: A little is enough for all the neceſſities and all the delights of nature; A retired life is the moſt pleaſant and the moſt ſecure; To ſit always at a feaſt is but to be always tempted to ſurfeits, and from numerous attendance there is more trouble and danger than uſeful ſervice.

Now if the deſire to leave their Poſterity great makes this fine Talk ſignifie nothing, and forces them notwithſtanding into all the Troubles and Dangers and Temptations to which covetous and ambitious men are expoſed; let them conſider this way of Providence, and, if they believe it, it will cure them of that diſeaſed temper of mind, for which their Philoſophy, though true, proves an inſufficient remedy: They will be convinc'd, That a little left to their Children, with all the Bleſſings that attend upon Religion and Faithfulneſs, and Juſtice and Charity, is a better Inheritance than the greateſt fortunes with a Curſe; That the biggeſt heap of Treaſure is but a poor proviſion, if, whilſt the Father lays up the gains of Oppreſſion, *God lays up his iniquity for his Children* Job, 21. 19.

Secondly, Proſperity or Affliction happens to the Children from the Vertues or Sins of the Parents by the Laws of men. A man ſees himſelf entring into poſſeſſion of the Honour and Wealth of his Anceſtors, and rejoices

rejoices in the Bleſſings of his Family which he was born to inherit: But ſuddenly he finds his condition changed, the deſcent of the Honour of his Houſe intercepted, and the Eſtate confiſcated, and the Blood tainted; and all this, not for his own Sin, but for the Sin of his Father. This proceeding of the Law is prudent, becauſe many Men are ſo deſperate, that no conſideration of themſelves can reſtrain them from miſchief, and yet ſuch Men are afraid to ruine their Poſterity, and by that fear are withheld from the greateſt miſchief. And this proceeding is not only prudent, but juſt, becauſe the reaſon of the publick good hath a title in all mens Honours and Eſtates antecedent and ſuperiour to their private right, and reſerved either implicitly or expreſly in the Laws of all Nations.

There is another conſideration of humane Laws in this argument of Proſperity or Affliction by deſcent, *viz.* That Laws make not a Man's Vertue his Title to his Eſtate, but Inheritance or Gift or Purchace, or any juſt way of acquiring it; nor doth a Man forfeit what he hath by the moſt common Vices: ſo that a fooliſh and riotous Heir of a provident Father juſtly poſſeſſes that wealth and plenty which he abuſes, and ſurfeits upon, and waſts prodigally till it be all gone; and leaves perhaps to a wiſe and good Son all the calamities of poverty, and more; for mere Poverty is not ſo great an affliction as Poverty after Riches, and want after Abundance.

Thirdly, There is a deſcent of Good and Evil by the

the courſe of Nature. A riotous man may have received from his temperate and healthful Parents ſuch a vigorous and firm Conſtitution, as will endure great and long and frequent Debauches, before it be quite broken: and this Man's ſober and temperate Son, notwithſtanding all his care and good government of himſelf, may be ſick for thoſe Debauches, and feel thoſe pains and aches which his Father's exceſs deſerved. For in this ſence too *the iniquity of the Fathers is viſited upon the Children.*

Now if Parents, being evil themſelves, may have good Children, and, being good themſelves, may have evil Children, and may have Children like themſelves, whether they be good or evil, and yet Proſperity or Affliction ſhall befall theſe Children by the actions of their Parents; it muſt neceſſarily follow that theſe things are uncertain, and that there muſt be *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.*

3. There muſt be *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*, becauſe they are ſo mix'd together in their perſons and intereſts, and imployments, and places of abode, that they cannot be diſtinguiſh'd in the Events that befall them. They march and fight in the ſame Army, and fare alike in danger or ſafety, abundance or famine, conqueſt or defeat. They live together in the City, and muſt breath in the ſame wholeſome, or infected Air. They ſail in the ſame Ship; and the hazards of the Sea, ſtorms or good weather, fair or croſs winds, a ſafe arrival or ſhipwrack, are alike for them

them both. They eat of the delicious or courſe fare, the plentiful or ſcarce proviſion, at the ſame Table.

Good and Bad men are mix'd in the World as the Tares and the Wheat in the Parable. If you will have the Wheat grow, the Tares muſt grow too; if you will pull up the Tares, the roots are intangled, and the Wheat muſt come up with it: They cannot be parted till the Harveſt: Then the Wheat may be gathered into the Barn by it ſelf, and the Tares burnt. So ſhall the Good and the Bad, who muſt for a while live together, and take part one with another in ſuch things as happen, be for ever divided at *the Reſurrection of the dead.*

Then the believing Husband and the unbelieving Wife, the religious Parents and the ungracious Children, the juſt Magiſtrate and ſeditious and unruly People, the good and charitable man and his envious and malicious Neighbour, who could not be ſeparated in many of the Bleſſings and Calamities of life, ſhall now be for ever ſeparated, to be happy or miſerable alone by themſelves.

But whilſt they live here, they muſt ſhare one in another's fortune, and enjoy the ſame Proſperity, or ſuffer the ſame Affliction together.

4. There muſt be *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*, for the more evident and certain diſtinguiſhing of them one from another.

The Devil's inſinuation againſt *Job*'s Integrity would have been unanſwerable, if it had been true, *viz.* That

That his Service of God was for the World's ſake; that his Love would be changed into Deſpight, and his Prayers into Curſing, if he were afflicted. But his behaviour in the greateſt Affliction that ever befell a meer Man was an undeniable proof of his Sincerity.

Thoſe in whom the Love of the World is the ruling affection, as the caſe now ſtands, trouble not themſelves much about Religion or Juſtice. Vertue ſometimes helps a little, but more often hinders them from obtaining their end; at leaſt they think ſo. Yet theſe Men would be very devout and preciſe, if by ſuch means they might be rich and great, and enjoy all manner of pleaſure, and have ſatisfaction to all their deſires. The Men to whom Gain is better than Godlineſs would not be Extortioners, if more were to be gotten by Juſtice: They would not be cruel, and without Compaſſion to the Poor, if they believed that their Wealth would increaſe by what they give away: They would not ſend their Adventures to *Arabia* and *India*, if they could have a better market at home; if building the Temple, and giving liberally to the Altar, would return their Stock with more Profit. If Religion were now become the only way for the Proud to be advanced, and for the Voluptuaries to be filled with ſenſual delights, and for the Spiteful to be revenged, what change would there ſuddenly be in the manners of wicked men! how reformed would they ſeem! very good in outward appearance, and yet as bad as ever; in a garb indeed of Religion, but deceiving

deceiving themſelves as well as others with a diſguiſe; *having a Form of Godlineſs, but denying the Power; being all the while in the gall of bitterneſs, and in the bonds of iniquity; lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God;* having their hearts full of all the abominations of Pride, and the idolatry of Covetouſneſs.

Flatterers pretend to be, and ſometimes think themſelves, ſincere and faithful Friends: But when the Man whom they love ſo paſſionately is falling, and they get as far off as they can from the ruines of his Greatneſs, then at laſt they find out the myſtery, if they knew it not before; that all their fond and officious ſervice was not reſpect to him, but themſelves; that they did not love his Perſon, but his Fortune, his Gifts, and the Benefits they hoped to receive from his Power.

Such a diſcovery doth this way of Providence make. Since *there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked*; ſince Men are poor and deſpiſed notwithſtanding their Juſtice and Religion, and, as it ſometimes happens, the poorer and the more deſpiſed for their ſake; the men who care for nothing but this World's good, will be unjuſt, and faithleſs, and unthankful, and perjured, if it will ſerve their turn better. They *will ſay unto God, Depart from us; for we deſire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him? and what profit ſhould we have, if we pray unto him?* Job 21. 14, 15.

That which would have been Hypocriſie, if Religion would have done their buſineſs, will be Pro-

phaneneſs, if it will not. That which would have been the ſecret Wickedneſs of the moſt cloſe and retired thoughts, ſcarce reflected on by him that thinks it, will now be the open Wickedneſs of word and deed. The Man will be known to the World, that would have been unknown to himſelf. He will be thus much nearer to Repentance, that he cannot be deceived in himſelf, and think he needs it not.

On the other ſide, if a Man will be Religious and Juſt, though he be never ſo great a loſer by it; if he will hold faſt his Integrity in riches and poverty, in honour and diſgrace, in good and evil report, when he is advanced, and when he is perſecuted for Righteouſneſs ſake; This will be a demonſtration that he fears and loves God above all, that the Laws of God are the Rules of his life, that he makes it his Buſineſs to be ſaved, that his Religion and Worſhip is not for worldly reſpects, and that his good Actions are not perverted and chang'd into Sins by corrupt ends and motives.

The ſumm of all theſe particulars is, That many of the Good and Evil things of this life happen to Men by the Juſtice or Injuſtice of their Neighbours, who have Free-will; and though they are forbidden under ſevere Penalties, yet they are not irreſiſtibly reſtrained from doing Injury: That men are proſperous or afflicted by the Vertues or Vices of their Parents: That the Good and Bad are ſo mix'd, that they cannot in many caſes but fare alike: and, That the diſtinction betwixt

betwixt the Good and the Bad is thereby made much more evident and undeniable: And therefore there muſt be *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.*

But for a farther Anſwer, All is not true that is implied in this Objection. For,

II. It will appear, that they who make this Objection againſt Providence are no competent Judges in the caſe, and ſuppoſe in their Objection that which is falſe.

It's ſuppoſed in this Objection, that the Righteous endure ſo much Grief, and the Wicked enjoy ſo much Pleaſure, as cannot conſiſt with God's Love to the Righteous, and Anger at the Wicked, if he take notice and be concerned in that which happens.

The better to judge of this Suppoſition, let two things be conſidered. 1. That by the outward eſtate of Men we know very little of their preſent Grief or Pleaſure. 2. If we did know their preſent Grief or Pleaſure, we cannot infer from thence which is the Good, and which is the Bad condition.

1. By the outward eſtate of Men we know very little of their preſent Grief or Pleaſure, That's a ſecret thing, and depends upon hidden cauſes, moſt of all upon thoſe prevailing affections that take up and employ their thoughts. It is viſible who hath Lands and great Houſes, and who hath none; who is followed by a long Train, and receives the Reſpects and the Complements, and who

may go whither he will without any notice: But which of these two enjoys himself best, and lives most at ease, is still a Question, which they who resolve by what they see are likely to be mistaken in their Resolution, to mis-place their Envy and Pity, to envy the Men that are miserable in all their great Pomp and State, and to pity them who are happy in their Obscurity; to judge unrighteous judgment, because they judge by outward appearance.

Scripture and Reason and Experience teach us, that Good men have the most true Delight both in Prosperity and Affliction; that *they have great peace who love God's law, and nothing can offend them*, Psal. 119. 165.

In Prosperity there are many things contribute to and improve the Joy of the Good: a quiet Conscience, Trust in God, Moderation, Humility, *Prudence, and Temperance, and Justice, and Fortitude; which are such things that men can have nothing more profitable in their life*, Wisd. 8. 7.

In ordinary Calamities, such as Sickness, Losses, *&c.* the Righteous have great Relief and ease from their Repentance and Prayers, their endeavour to make a Benefit of the Cross, their humble Resignation and Submission to God, and their Belief concerning the Wisdom and Goodness of his Providence. But if they be persecuted for Righteousness sake, if the Apostles and Martyrs suffer for the Confession of *Christ*, it may be a great Calamity in the judgment of their Persecutours, but to their own sense it is a state of Joy and Triumph.

Triumph. *Chriſt* tells his Diſciples, *In the world ye ſhall have tribulation, but in me ye ſhall have peace. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. Theſe things have I ſpoken, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.* S. *Paul* exhorts them, *Rejoice in the Lord always. Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and ſupplication with thanksgiving let your requeſts be made known unto God: and the peace of God, which paſſeth all underſtanding, ſhall keep your hearts and minds, through Chriſt Jeſus. Rejoice evermore; in every thing give thanks.* He gives an account of himſelf when he was going to his Martyrdom, not like a Man overpreſs'd with grief: *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of Righteouſneſs, which the Lord the Righteous Judge ſhall give me at that day.* 2 Tim. 4. 6, 7, 8. They were impriſoned, and ſcourged, and baniſh'd, and *killed all the day long*; yet full of conſolation. They were *troubled on every ſide, but not diſtreſſed; perplexed, but not in deſpair; perſecuted, but not forſaken; caſt down, but not deſtroyed; ſorrowful, yet always rejoicing; having nothing, and yet poſſeſſing all things.* They ſuffered all that malicious men in Power could do; but *they were ſtrengthened with all might unto all patience and long-ſuffering with joyfulneſs.* They were thought to be in great miſery, by thoſe who could look no farther than the outward

appearance;

may go whither he will without any notice: But which of these two enjoys himself best, and lives most at ease, is still a Question, which they who resolve by what they see are likely to be mistaken in their Resolution, to mis-place their Envy and Pity, to envy the Men that are miserable in all their great Pomp and State, and to pity them who are happy in their Obscurity; to judge unrighteous judgment, because they judge by outward appearance.

Scripture and Reason and Experience teach us, that Good men have the most true Delight both in Prosperity and Affliction; that *they have great peace who love God's law, and nothing can offend them*, Psal. 119. 165.

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appearance; but all that while they had the mighty ſupport of Faith and Hope, the ſtrong conſolations of Grace and the Holy Spirit, S. *Stephen*'s Viſion, *Heaven opened, and Jeſus ſtanding on the right-hand of God:* into whoſe *Preſence*, where *there is fulneſs of Joy*, they ſhould make ſo much the more haſte, by how much the ſharper their Sufferings were.

On the other ſide, men magnifie the Proſperity of the Rich, let them be never ſo bad, and *they call the Proud, Happy:* but the account will be another thing, if the Abatements be deducted. Their Pleaſures are ſhort, a Blaze, *the crackling of thorns under a pot*; often interrupted, not by unlucky accidents only, but moſt of all by their own unruly Paſſions, which are ſo many Vipers, always breeding within them, and gnawing through their Bowels. *The Wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt. There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* Iſa. 57. 20, 21. What Peace can they have who entertain ſuch Enemies to Peace within themſelves, Pride, Scornfulneſs, Envy, Vain-glory, fooliſh Hope, Inſatiable deſire; whoſe Enjoyments are eaſily corrupted with Diſcontent; who deſpiſe their own Succeſs in things of the greateſt value, if they be diſappointed in a trifle; whoſe Pleaſures are often purchaſed with long and ſharp Pains, that tread upon the heels of them? And although Conſcience ſeems to give them but little trouble, to be either reconciled to what they do, or faſt aſleep, and to obſerve

ſerve nothing; yet ever now and then it ſcares them with Dreams, and terrifies them with Viſions, and upon ſome ſurprizing accident will be apt to ſtart of a ſudden, and awake in a great affright, and will not without much ado be pacified and laid to ſleep again.

This is very often the Inſide of that gawdy Shew that the Proſperity of the Wicked makes. Their Afflictions are not ſo apt to deceive the ſtanders by; there it is eaſie to ſee how their Sins and unmortified Luſts and evil Conſcience increaſe their Torment: They have uſed Religion too ill to expect any relief from thence; they know not how to make God their Refuge; they are it may be too ſtubborn and deſperate to pray at all, or too guilty to pray with any confidence; their Pride and Haughtineſs makes them more impatient; they break their teeth with biting the Chain; they ſtruggle with that which is too ſtrong for them; they can neither caſt off, nor bear their Burthen; they have no Patience, becauſe they have *no Hope*, and are *without God in the World.*

The ſumm of this Conſideration is, That whatever the condition of Men be, high or low, rich or poor, *Solomon*'s Obſervation will be found true, that *God giveth to a man that is good in his ſight, Wiſdom, and Knowledge and Joy; but to the ſinner he giveth Travel.* Eccleſ. 2. 26. And therefore they who conclude of mens preſent Grief or Pleaſure by their outward Eſtate, are incompetent Judges and miſtake the matter.

But

But ſuppoſing their Judgment concerning Mens preſent Eſtate were true, and the Calamities were as grievous, and the Pleaſures as entire and perfect, as they ſeem: yet,

2. From the Knowledge of mens preſent Grief or Pleaſure, we cannot infer which is the Good, and which is the Bad condition.

When the effect of mens Fortunes upon their Minds and Manners is ſeen, how a laſting Contentment is obtained or loſt, how the Happineſs of another life is ſecured or neglected; then, and not till then, a certain Judgment may be made. Now, upon enquiry, it will be found, that in theſe reſpects both Conditions prove an advantage to the Good by their good uſe, and a miſchief to the Wicked by their abuſe of them.

The Righteous in Authority encourage and countenance the good, relieve the oppreſſed, *break the jaws of the wicked, and pluck the ſpoil out of their teeth*, Job 29. 17. and by their Juſtice and Temperance, and Reverence to God and to Holy things, bring Religion and Vertue into more eſteem, and do as much as in them lies to convert Sinners. However, they are ſuch a check and reſtraint upon them, that their wicked diſpoſition cannot ſo openly and boldly diſcover it ſelf, as it would if they were let alone, both in doing wrong, and enticing others to the ſame Sins which they commit.

When

When the Righteous abound in Wealth, *they make to themſelves friends of the unrighteous Mammon.* They give Alms, feed the hungry, cloath the naked, viſit the Fatherleſs and the Widow in their diſtreſs; watch and pray leſt Luxury or Pride or Prophaneneſs or Uncharitableneſs ſhould turn their temporal Bleſſings into Plagues and Curſes: They *truſt not in uncertain Riches,* but in the living God, whoſe Gifts they receive with thankfulneſs and fear: They *do good,* and *are rich in good Works* as well as great Poſſeſſions, *ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in ſtore for themſelves a good foundation againſt the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.* 1 Tim. 6. 18, 19.

The Wicked may be in the ſame Proſperity, but with another Behaviour. The worſe they are, the more they will be tempted and inſnared. They which were proud and vain before, will be inſenſibly led away into more Pride and more Vanity; forgetful of him who made the difference; eaſily abuſed into monſtrous conceits of themſelves, and the moſt unjuſt compariſons of themſelves with others; ſoftned ſo much with delight that they will be able to endure nothing that is croſs to their will and humour; ſetting no bounds to their enjoyments; impatient of having their preſent Pleaſures allayed with conſideration of the future, with the Fear of God, or the remembrance of Death; which notwithſtanding comes on apace, ſomewhat the faſter it may be by reaſon of their Pleaſures, and, if they take no better care, will ſurprize

them altogether unprepared for the change of their pleaſant life (if it were granted to be ſo) into Sickneſs and Languiſhing, and the expectation of Death and the Day of Judgment.

The difference is no leſs in the Afflictions that befall the Righteous and the Wicked together. For the Wicked, if they continue impenitent, will grow worſe and worſe, envious and malicious and ſullen, and farther from ſeeking to God than in their Proſperity: But the ſame condition ſhall be to the Good a Monitor to examine themſelves; to ſearch and try their ways, and be very exact in their Reformation; to enquire out and amend their ſmalleſt Faults, of which in their better eſtate they took little notice, and contented themſelves with being kept back from preſumptuous Sins; to renew, and confirm, and ſtrengthen their good Reſolutions, which even lawful Delight had made too looſe and ſlack. And whereas in their Sorrows many of the Wicked renounce God, and diſhonour him with Pride, and Stubbornneſs, and Infidelity, and Blaſphemy, and Impatience; theſe own God's Dominion, and humble themſelves under his mighty Hand, and acknowledge his Juſtice, and honour him before Men with Confeſſion of Sin, and Repentance, and Submiſſions, and Prayers, and Thankſgiving.

Thus the ſame Events are to the Righteous a nouriſhing Food or a wholeſome Medicine; and to the Wicked, a ſweet or a bitter Poiſon.

If

If then by what is viſible of mens condition we cannot judge certainly of their Grief and Pleaſure; and if we could, yet Grief or Pleaſure may either of them be a Bleſſing or a Curſe, and which it is in a particular caſe no Man can tell, if he know not how either of them will be uſed, and what effect they will have; if the Objection be of no force, unleſs it be granted that preſent Delight is always Good, and Pain is always Evil: it will be plain enough, that ſomething is ſuppoſed which is very obſcure, and doubtful, and hard to be judged of, and always falſly ſuppoſed, when this is uſed as an Argument againſt Providence, that there is *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.*

III. However, the Day of Judgment is a ſufficient Anſwer to the Objection.

The belief and expectation of this was implied in the laſt Particular, as the great reaſon of the behaviour of the Righteous in both conditions, and as their great ſupport in Affliction: and the not believing or conſidering this, or conſidering it rather with deſpair than hope, is the reaſon why the Wicked are ſo ill-governed, and often ſo unhappy in their Proſperity, and ſo comfortleſs in Affliction. But if Bad men lived in more Delight, and Good men in more trouble and Grief than indeed they do, and God would not interpoſe his Almighty power to alter the courſe of things; yet when the Wicked *go away into everlaſting Puniſhment,*

and the Righteous into Life eternal, Matth. 25. 46. *Then ſhall ye return and diſcern betwixt him that ſerveth God, and him that ſerveth him not*, Mal. 3 18. And though Men are apt to think that time ſtands almoſt ſtill when they feel ſharp Pains, and the extremity of them makes minutes ſeem longer than days, as days in a tranſport of Pleaſure ſeem ſwifter than minutes: yet the no-proportion betwixt Time and Eternity will endure all this falſe reckoning, and make a clear account and unanſwerable apology for Providence notwithſtanding. When Men feel the ſmart of their own, or think of their friends Affliction, or their enemies Proſperity, they are eaſily deluded with Impatience, or Envy, or Compaſſion. But if you would judge truly how inconſiderable the things that happen now are in compariſon of an Eternal ſtate, look back to the Patriarchs and Prophets, to the Apoſtles and Martyrs; and above all, *to Jeſus, the Author and Finiſher of our Faith, who, for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Heb. 12. 2. What was that moment of life in which they were perſecuted, afflicted, tormented, in compariſon of all the time ſince, and for ever to come, in all which they enjoy the moſt pure and raviſhing Delights, wherewith God is now rewarding their Obedience, and Humility, and Faith, and Patience? Is the Objection againſt Providence, for leaving them expoſed to ſo many Calamities, too hard for them to anſwer? Do they think Heaven, upon the

the terms they had it, too dear a Purchace? It was expedient and neceſſary, in purſuance of the wiſe Counſels and Purpoſes of God, that they ſhould ſuffer for a while: But *is God unrighteous? doth he forget their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope?* S. *Paul*, when he felt the ſmart of his preſent Afflictions, called them *light afflictions, for a moment, not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed.* What muſt he judge of them now that the Afflictions are paſt, and remembred only for the help and increaſe of his Joy; now that he is entred into the poſſeſſion of that glorious Reward which he then had only in view and proſpect?

On the other ſide, Whither are the great Oppreſſors and Deſtroyers of Mankind gone? Where is *Herod*, and *Pontius Pilate*, and the reſt of the bloody Perſecutors of *Chriſt* and his Saints? What is become of all their Pride, and their envied Power and Glory? Is God their Debtor ſtill for their Injuſtice and Blaſphemies, and their inſolent and prophane Joys? Hath he forgotten what they did? or doth he approve it? Now they know that which either they did not believe, or would not conſider before. They abuſed his Patience, that waited for their Repentance: and now they feel the Puniſhment of their Sin in the exquiſite Torments of the Soul; and, full of fear and terrour, expect greater at the Reſurrection of the Body. If it ſeem ſtrange to you, that God ſhould ſuffer the Righteous to be at the mercy of the Wicked; Behold the

Rich

Rich man in Torment looking up to *Abraham*, and begging for a drop of water to cool his tongue, and *Abraham*, without any compaſſion of his Son, defending the Juſtice of God's dealing with him and the poor Beggar that lay at his Door.

Behold the Goodneſs and Severity of God.

His *Goodneſs*, leading the Righteous into all the ways of diſcipline and trial: proving their Obedience in the moſt dangerous Temptations, both from that Pleaſure which their nature covets, and that Pain which their nature abhors: that when the World and the Fleſh and the Devil have aſſaulted them with all their weapons, they may get an intire and perfect Victory, and their Integrity may have the cleareſt evidence; and they may be confirmed in Faith, and made ſtrong and conſtant and perſevering in Vertue; and, after their good and faithful Service, *enter into their Maſter's joy.*

His *Severity*, ſuffering the Wicked ſometimes to be pampered with fulneſs of Delight, and ſatisfied in all their Deſires; and ſometimes to be afflicted with Croſſes and Diſappointments, and tempted with Miſeries and Plagues to the utmoſt Impatience: that they alſo may be tried, and that the Wickedneſs, which would lie concealed for want of occaſion, may break out and be brought to light; that in the variety of conditions, they may be led, if they will themſelves, into the commiſſion of all Sins, and may add Iniquity to Iniquity, till the meaſure be full; that God may be glorified

glorified in *the Day of Viſitation*, and *the Revelation of* that *righteous Judgment*, which (how hard ſoever they may ſeem now) will plainly reſolve all the Problems and Riddles of Providence.

The ſum of what hath been ſaid is, That it is unavoidably neceſſary for things to fall out to the Good and the Bad indifferently and uncertainly: That no Judgment can be made, by that which happens to men, of their Grief or Pleaſure, nor which of them is Good or Bad for them: That there will be a day of Judgment wherein every Man ſhall receive according to his works: And therefore it is no argument againſt Providence, that *there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.*

But it may be objected from Scripture, How doth this conſiſt with what is there declared, that *Godlineſs is profitable for all things, having promiſe of the life that now is*, 1 *Tim.* 4. 8. according to which, we find in *Moſes*, and the Pſalms, and the Writings of *Solomon* and the Prophets, and in the New Teſtament, ſeveral expreſſions which ſeem to import a Promiſe of Proſperity to the Righteous?

A ſufficient Anſwer to all the places of Scripture that are alledged to that purpoſe will be given in ſome one of theſe three Particulars.

1. Abundance of the Promiſes uſually inſiſted on are made to particular Perſons or Nations, and muſt not be extended farther, as Promiſes for the performance

ance of which God's Faithfulneſs is ingaged; though they may be applied as Incouragements to Hope, when there ſeems to be a parity or advantage of Reaſon in the caſe. Many things were promiſed to the Patriarchs, and to the Captains and Judges and Kings of *Iſrael*, and to the Prophets and Apoſtles; and they were aſſured that thoſe things muſt happen, for which they had the Security of God's Word. But it would be a great extravagance, for any Man elſe to be aſſured of the ſame Events by applying thoſe promiſes. If a Souldier aſſure himſelf that he ſhall have Victory, becauſe it was promiſed to *Joſhua*; or, a Sick man, that he ſhall recover, becauſe a Prophet was ſent to *Hezekiah*, to tell him that he ſhould be healed; or if a paſſenger in a Ship aſſure all his Company of an Eſcape with life, when they are driven by Storm upon the Rocks, becauſe the Angel of God was ſent to tell the Apoſtle *Paul*, *God hath given thee all them that ſail with thee*, Acts 27. 24. The things may happen accordingly, as the predictions of a Falſe prophet may come to paſs by chance; and then they who uſe the Scripture in this faſhion may talk as they pleaſe of the skill and power of Faith, and what Wonders it can do with all the promiſes that are to be found in the Bible. But if the things happen not, then their confident application to themſelves, of promiſes that were made to others, runs into Scandal and Blaſphemy, and repreſents God as a Deceiver, that promiſes, and does not perform. But though the promiſes to them are not

promiſes

promiſes to us, yet the Conſideration of them is of great uſe to engage our Obedience, and incourage our Hope, when we ſee how liberally God beſtowed upon them Temporal bleſſings: and though we cannot infer from thence, that we ſhall be bleſs'd in the ſame manner, we may infer the ſame Love and Care of us, and Acceptance of our faithful ſervice. In this ſenſe, *Whatſoever things were written afore-time, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*, Rom. 15. 4.

2. Thoſe Promiſes which concern all Good men are not Promiſes of Proſperity, but of God's Protection and Care of them in every condition, and cauſing *all things to work together for good to them that love God.* Rom. 8. 28. nothing ſhall happen to them without his notice and allowance. It may be good for them to be afflicted: and therefore the ſame Love of God ſometimes prevents Afflictions from befalling them; ſometimes delivers them after they have ſuffered a little; ſometimes keeps them for a long time under ſevere Diſcipline, but comforts and ſupports them all the while. *The ſteps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: Though he fall, he ſhall not be utterly caſt down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.* Pſal. 37. 23, 24. God will not forſake him, nor forget his complaint; if troubles abound, *conſolations ſhall abound* much more. *Though the outward man periſh, the inward man is renewed day by day.* 2 Cor. 4. 16. *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of Temptations*, 2 Pet. 2. 9.

either by keeping them out of that condition in which they will be tempted; or ſo aſſiſting them with his Grace, that they ſhall not fall into that Sin (for example, that Apoſtaſie) to which they are tempted: though they may fall into that Perſecution from whence very ſtrong Temptations may ariſe. *God is faithful, who will not ſuffer them to be tempted above that they are able; but will with the Temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that they may be able to bear it,* 1 Cor. 10. 13. This Watching of Providence over the Righteous, and Care for them, and Aſſiſting them in every condition with convenient Grace, is the ſum of thoſe Promiſes which are abſolutely made to Godlineſs in the Scripture, and eſpecially in the New Teſtament.

3. Many of the places of Scripture moſt inſiſted on in this Argument are not Promiſes, but general Rules, wherein the ordinary method of Providence, and the uſual effects of many Vertues and Vices are declared. *Solomon* tells us of that Wiſdom which conſiſts eſpecially in the Fear of God, *Length of days are in her right-hand, and in her left-hand riches and honour,* Prov. 3. 16. *By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life.* Prov. 22. 4. There are many ſuch general Rules as theſe, the reaſon and truth of which is evident in moſt caſes; and it is as evident that they will not hold always. In the ordinary courſe of things, the moſt Strength, and beſt Courage, and the wiſeſt Conduct ſhall get the Victory; Diligence in a profitable Calling ſhall make a man rich;

rich; if he be humble, he ſhall be beloved; if he be faithful, he ſhall be truſted; He that is prudent and juſt in his actions ſhall be eſteemed, and have a good reputation. But for all that, accidents which no Man can foreſee or prevent, may interpoſe betwixt the moſt likely means and the end. The chances of War, Thieves, Robbers, unfaithful Servants, treacherous Friends, the conſtructions of jealouſie and ill nature, ſecret whiſpering, or open defaming and falſe accuſing, *the Peſtilence that walketh in darkneſs* infecting a Man's good Name, *and the Arrow which wounds* it *at noon-day*, may hinder all thoſe Vertues of that Reward which is the natural effect and conſequence of them. And in ſuch caſes, *the race will not be to the ſwift, nor the battel to the ſtrong; neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of skill*, Eccleſ 9. 11. Theſe are general Rules, but *Time and Chance* make many Exceptions: from all which it appears conſiſtent with Scripture, as well as Reaſon, that *there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.*

The conſideration of what hath been ſaid will diſpoſe us to be ſlow in judging our neighbours, and careful in governing our ſelves, as we paſs together through all the changes and chances of this mortal life. Events will no better juſtifie our opinion of other mens actions, than Examples will prove the goodneſs of our own. We muſt judge by Rules, not by Succeſs; and we muſt live by Rules, not by Examples.

Deſpiſe

Deſpiſe no Man for his Poverty or ill Succeſs, leſt you deſpiſe a Man whom God will honour. Bleſs not *the covetous whom the Lord abhorreth. Let not thine heart envy ſinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long: For ſurely there is an end, and thine expectation ſhall not be cut off.* Prov. 23. 17, 18. In Actions be patient: *In the day of adverſity conſider.* In Proſperity, *be not high-minded; but fear.* Remember that a low Eſtate may be your great Benefit and Security, and that Power and Riches may be a Snare to their owner. Learn of S. *Paul, in whatſoever ſtate you are, therewith to be content.* Take in good part, and make the beſt of every thing that happens: and be well aſſured that nothing can happen amiſs, if that be your continual care, which was the reſult of all *Solomon*'s ſtudy and experience, *Eccleſ.* 12. 13, 14. *Fear God, and keep his Commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God ſhall bring every work into judgment, with every ſecret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

FINIS.